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WILL THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS WORK?

DURANT DRAKE.

THE most important achievement which the successful termination of the war makes possible is undoubtedly the creation of the long needed League of Nations or supernational government. The overthrow of the political autocracies, which vigorously opposed the plan, the free hand given to the Allies, who have pretty thoroughly committed themselves to it, the discrediting of the policy of nationalistic selfishness and the marked success attending the policy of international co-operation, make it certain that a serious effort is about to be made to restrict permanently the rights of nations by some sort of higher authority. President Wilson, the unquestioned leader of mankind to-day, has pointed the way; publicists, statesmen, political parties, and a horde of popular writers are advertising this next step in human progress.

The federation of the world is coming. But how fast? How great a leap forward will statesmen dare now to take? And, whatever plan they try to put into operation, will it work? The answer to these questions depends upon the state of mind of the people of the nations that are to be thus federated. It is not exclusively a problem for statesmen and students of international law, though their expert services will be needed. It is in even greater degree a problem for the moralists, the educators, the editors and preachers, and all who can help mould the minds of men. For difficult as it will be to draw up a just and workable system of international law and administration, that difficulty is as nothing to that of persuading the people of the component nations to give that loyal allegiance to this new authority which alone can transform it from a paper plan into a working system.

For the crucial fact is this: the acceptance of any supernational authority will involve sacrifice; sometimes material sacrifice, sometimes sacrifice of prestige or supposed

“honor,” of national aspirations and expectations. Certainly the advantages gained will far outweigh the sacrifices. But that is the case with all morality, and yet morality by no means easily prevails over the selfishness and shortsightedness of men’s hearts. Into the field of politics and economic rivalry morality has scarcely begun to penetrate,—its conquest of this great field will at best be pathetically slow. So the one outstanding and obvious duty of the hour is to prepare the way for the coming of the league, to make its paths straight. Every school and church and newspaper should be mobilized. The great organization of writers and speakers who have been giving their services to keep this nation in war temper should instantly be utilized to awaken and mould the temper which alone can sustain an organized, enforced, and lasting justice and peace.

The first aspect of this task—and that which will doubtless be most readily recognized—is to convince the peoples of the imperative necessity of the league; not merely that it may be created, but that it may be loyally upheld through the long period of readjustments and necessary concessions. We must not let the world lapse into a complacent self-congratulation on the collapse of Teutonic militarism and the exit of Kaisers and kings. Other nations may yet become powerful, arrogant, imperialistic; the lessons of history are quickly forgotten by the ambitious and the proud—and, indeed, there are examples of successful aggression as striking as those of defeated ambition. Sources of friction and bitterness will long persist, injustices will still rankle, thwarted ambitions still smoulder. The growing complexity of international relations will produce more occasions than ever for friction. Nothing is more likely than that this will *not* be the last war, unless we set to with utmost determination and create a mechanism which shall make the penalties for aggression so instant and certain that it will be universally recognized as suicidal.

The conclusion to be drawn from this candid forecast is not that drawn by the jingoes in each nation, who bid their

countrymen continue to prepare to defend their territory and their honor, but rather that drawn by the prophets of the new era, who insist not only that the individual nation ought not to have to defend itself—any more than the individual citizen has to—but that it must not be *allowed* to make for itself the momentous decision of war. The right and the duty, to make war must be taken away from the nation, as the right to murder has been taken away from the citizen, and lodged in a higher tribunal. For the nations are too prejudiced, too hot-headed, too ambitious, too sensitive as to what they call their rights and their honor, to be entrusted with so dangerous a privilege. War in the future must be the prerogative of the supernational government alone; only so can the nations be rescued from the pall of insecurity and the cost of self-protection.

It is in the nick of time that this step is to be taken. An internationally decreed war, if it should ever be necessary, to down an unruly and defiant nation, would be short and certain and probably localized. Another anarchic war, like that from which we have just emerged, would probably mean the suicide of civilization. For inventiveness has by no means reached its limit with regard to destruction; and the horrors of war might well be far beyond anything the world has yet experienced. The submarine of the future, used by a nation with a long coast line, and ample resources, will be able to paralyze shipping and produce starvation on a scale not yet realized. The aircraft of the future, with their new explosives, will be able to destroy every city, every railway and waterway, every storehouse of grain. The poisoning of water-supply, the release of virulent disease-germs, and of deadly gases, might be done on such a scale as quickly to exterminate whole nations. Yes, war *must* end, or it will end human life on earth. And the surest way, probably the only way, to end it is to make militaristic enterprise obviously unprofitable, by the creation of a supernational executive body, backed by armed forces and existing for the avowed purpose (among other things) of *making* it unprofitable.

We must combat, then, by might and main, that vague optimism that expects things to come out all right if they are let alone, that inertia that would let the peoples sink back into another era of unchecked nationalistic rivalry. It is to be hoped that the pacifists, *i.e.*, the passivists, who counted on the efficacy of non-resistance in touching the hearts of the predatory and the proud, who thought that words, and paper treaties, could shame them or win them to a brotherly spirit, have learned their lesson. Isolated instances to the contrary, human nature is, unhappily, such that its fiercer impulses cannot be tamed by charity and patience. Will must be met by will, force by readiness to use force. The ingenuity for evil and the blind passions of men, must be counteracted by a greater ingenuity in devising the good, and a greater and wiser passion in embodying it. *Effort*, effort of organization, of thinking, of training, of education, is the inexorable price of progress.

On the other hand, if overoptimism is dangerous, pessimism is treason. We *must* believe that this great task can be achieved, and to him who casts doubt we must cry "Shame"! We are naturally, and properly, afraid of faith, these latter days. Faith has so often meant the effort of believing what is irrational, unevidenced or obviously untrue. Because of faith, the spread of a sane and scientific world-view is still seriously blocked. But what we need is, after all, not less faith, but a better founded faith. There are some things which it is hard to believe psychologically, though it is not hard rationally—as when the child learning to swim is told that the water will buoy him up if he lies still, or moves his arms gently. That is the proper province for faith,—to keep us believing ardently, not in "what we know ain't true," but in what we know *can be made* true, if we will. As in William James' famous parable of the Alpine climber who needed faith to enable him to jump the chasm which confronted him, so the world now needs faith that the chasms between nations can be successfully bridged. We must learn the lessons taught by the historic faiths, and utilize this tremendous dynamic, not so much in

enabling men to bear the ills of life with serenity, as in enabling them to dare and attempt and conquer those ills. Why, indeed, should not this great faith and loyalty form the core of our religion? And what would it be, after all, but loyalty to the Christian ideal of the Brotherhood of Man, and the Christian faith in the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth?

But—as the experience of the Christian Church only too well shows—a sense of the imperious need and worth of our ideal, and faith in it, are not the only psychological prerequisites to its realization. We must translate that ideal into concrete attitudes and sacrifices for everyday use. We must be willing, not only in the abstract, but with reference to each particular case, to see the general interest of mankind prevail over our own national desire. We must loyally abide by the majority decision of the supernational tribunal, even if we feel it to be unjust or mistaken. We must care more for the welfare of the world than for the welfare of America—just as we now care more (or ought to care more) for the welfare of America than for the welfare of New York or Illinois.

Reference to contemporary newspapers, congressional reports, and the conversation of the man on the street, shows what a long way we have yet to go in the matter of cultivating this attitude. For example, as an argument against the desirability of joining a League of Nations, Senator Cummins recently declared that the United States would not, in the concrete emergency, remain loyal to the dictates of such a league. “What would the United States do? My answer is that it would do whatever its people at that time believed it was for the interests of the country to do.”¹

Doubtless for this country not to take such an individualistic and selfish attitude will require a change of heart on the part of multitudes. But the alternative to such a wholesale conversion is the continuance of inter-

¹ As quoted in the *New York Times*, January 31, 1917.

national anarchy. And he who harps upon the difficulties of the change is a slacker.

What shall we say, then, of those who openly *oppose* the change? "There is only one national morality which we Americans have a right to consider—the interest of America. . . . Any American in a position of power or influence who allows any consideration but the selfish interests of America to guide him is a traitor."¹

This shockingly outspoken advocacy of collective selfishness is, it is to be feared, but a candid expression of the conscious or latent temper of great masses of our people. Is there not clear indication here that our schools and churches have been woefully at fault in failing to make the present generation realize that such collective selfishness, even when masquerading under the name of patriotism, is far wickeder and infinitely more disastrous than individual selfishness?

If this is "nationalism," one must sympathize with the idealists, such as Sir Rabindranath Tagore, Mr. L. P. Jacks, Mr. Henry Ford, who denounce nationalism as the great curse of the world. One must sympathize with Mr. Bouck White's symbolic burning of the American flag, and the refusal of the Baltimore schoolboys to salute it. We must spurn a mental attitude which has been responsible probably for more suffering than any other mental twist that has ever obsessed the human race. If this be patriotism, patriotism is indeed, in Johnson's famous words, "the last refuge of a scoundrel," the camouflage by which mob-selfishness masks its true nature.

But need patriotism be selfishness? Why can we not cultivate a loyal and proud love of our country that shall be above all things sensitive to keep it from the dishonor of self-seeking? Certainly, under our President's noble leadership, our nation sprang to arms in April, 1917, with little trace of selfish intent. By that great and chivalrous

¹ J. M. Patterson, in *Notebook of a Neutral*, New York, 1916. The whole book is in this vein.

act it has perhaps wiped out the stains of certain earlier acts of aggression and self-seeking. Will that spirit of service, of national sacrifice for the good of mankind, persist during the less exciting months of the peace settlement? Shall we check all desire for revenge, all impulse to seize this opportunity to push our own trade at the expense of that of other nations, or to boycott the beaten nations and add, for our own profit, to the crushing burdens under which they must, at best, for many decades stagger?

Certainly, if we do any of these things, we must not call such selfishness patriotism. That splendid word is rightly applied to something quite different—to the spirit where men subordinate their individual wills to the common will, renounce, if necessary, their separate interests, or offer their lives for a larger good, and find their joy in so doing. Patriotism, in short, rightly spells not selfishness but sacrifice; and there is nothing better or nobler in human life. But patriotism, thus conceived, is a matter of concentric circles. Loyalty to one's family, or to one's club or college, does not imply disloyalty to the city or village in which one lives; nor does civic pride involve disloyalty to state or nation. Similarly, love and loyalty to our country does not rightly require disloyalty to the great brotherhood of man which not only Christianity but the most elementary common sense holds up to us as the supreme object of our sacrifice and service. Surely we must cultivate "the international mind"—it is our most pressing duty just now, because international sentiment has as yet been so little cultivated. But to suppose that the era of international co-operation and supernational loyalties is going to lessen our local prides and patriotism is a serious blunder. It is going to clarify and purge them, it is not going to make them less coercive or less beautiful.

Difficult questions, of course, will arise on every hand. Is it group-selfishness for us to continue to keep our flag over the Philippines? Is that an infringement of the now fully accepted principle of the right of the peoples of the earth to choose their own rulers, an infringement perpetu-

ated because of our pride in seeing our dominions far flung across the seas, or because we covet control of their trade, or because we are impatient at their ways of doing things and take satisfaction in Americanizing their methods? Or, on the contrary, is the continuance of our rule in those islands due to a profound conviction on the part of those who know the conditions there, that that rule is for the present necessary to avert civil war or anarchy, and therefore our part of the "white man's burden"? Doubtless there are two sides to the argument. But in how many discussions is the welfare of the islanders made the one consideration? And even if it is the avowed consideration, can we be sure that our view of the evidence is not biased by the unacknowledged pull of the selfish motives?

How about the Monroe Doctrine, which even such an idealist as Mr. Bryan says we will not dream of surrendering? What right have we to arrogate to ourselves the office of protector of the nations in the continent to the south of us? Would it not be a wise humility for us to commit their safety into the hands of the world-federation? By so doing we should allay their present widespread suspicion of our intentions, ensure their independence even more firmly than we alone can guarantee it, and cease to irritate Europe by our "No trespassing" placard. And honestly, now that we have interfered in the affairs of Europe, so opportunely and effectively, how can we maintain our old theory of the dichotomy of interests between the hemispheres?

Import duties are another constant cause of national rivalries, jealousies, and irritation. Obviously, world-wide free-trade is the ultimate ideal toward which we must work. We have but to picture to ourselves how the development and prosperity of this country would have been hampered by the existence of tariff barriers between the states, to realize how the prosperity of the Great Community has been obstructed by such barriers between nations. But there will have to be a much more widely diffused education in economics before the peoples of many of the nations will

vote for free trade. Mr. Hughes, the Australian premier, insisted just the other day on the right of the separate nations to impose tariffs at their own sweet will. It would be clearly unwise to attempt too much in the way of internationalization at once, and the league will doubtless have to consent to regard tariff-making as an internal national affair. If that is so, it is essential that we should refuse to let ourselves be exasperated by the tariffs of other nations, however irksome they may be to our industries. That virtue of live and let live should be far easier for us than for the British, who open their own doors to the products of all nations, and might reasonably expect the same privilege from them.

Greater relinquishments of sovereignty than that involved in the abolition of tariff barriers may, however, be necessary. Reduction of fleets and armies to the proportional standard required by the supernational council, acceptance of the boundary lines decided upon by the supernational court, compulsory passing of legislation to grant a proper freedom to racial minorities within a nation—such concessions may come hard to proud and powerful nations, but are essential if the league is to function. Hence it is dangerous individualism in Mr. Bryan, for example, to say, “I am not willing that this nation shall put its army and navy at the command of a council which we cannot control.”¹ Or for Professor P. M. Brown to write, “Nations cannot jeopardize the freedom necessary for the achievement of their separate purposes and ideals by submitting to a common sovereign possessing coercive powers. An international executive thus becomes undesirable and repugnant, a menace to the legitimate aims and sensibilities of nations.”²

We must face the truth that the sacrifices required will be greater for some nations than for others. If it falls to our lot to make a concession for the general good, we must

¹ In his speech at the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, 1916.

² P. M. Brown, *International Realities*, p. 117.

be ready to make it. Moreover, there are few precedents upon which to base decisions in international matters, there are few judges not unconsciously biased. Impartial, absolutely just and wise decisions we hope there will be; but there are bound to be many that seem, and are, one-sided, unfair to some nation, based upon an insufficient grasp of the facts, or colored by passion and prejudice. The essential thing is that we take these decisions, when they are made, as good sports; just as in baseball the game cannot go on unless both sides accept in good humor the umpire's decisions, however unjust and disastrous they may seem.

These difficulties can be overcome if we have the will to make the league work, if we care enough to make the necessary concessions. If not, they will wreck the undertaking. Our plain duty, then, is to forget our fears and suspicions of other nations' intentions, our bitterness and hatred and scorn of their wrongdoing, and to cultivate sympathy and understanding. For the former mental attitudes create trouble just as surely as the latter heal it. Our great danger now is not from Germany, or Japan, or any other nation, it is from ourselves. We are unchastened by years of suffering, we are rich, proud, unbeaten; we want *our* way in everything. All about us we hear the exultant or suspicious words of those who would have us punish more severely an already prostrate Germany, keep our clutch on her throat, treat her as her autocratic rulers would have treated us. In no such way can a lasting peace be established. Might does not make right simply because it is our might. The time has come to apply the Golden Rule in politics. What we should be thinking of is not Germany's past sins, but the future of the family of nations. It is not "surrendering to Germany" to return good for her evil, it is safeguarding the future welfare of men.

Patriotism, like charity, begins at home. But it does not end there. Only as we cultivate a sense of duty to all our sister-nations, a "put yourself in their place" attitude, and a firm loyalty to the common legislative, judicial and

administrative machinery which is gradually to be created, can we seriously believe that the era of international wars is over and attainment by peaceful means of justice and prosperity for all the peoples of the earth on its way to realization.

DURANT DRAKE.

VASSAR COLLEGE.